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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

COUNTRY Poland

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SUBJECT Medical and Dental Care: Facilities/Procedures/Shortages

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SUPP. TO
REPORT NO.

1. "The following information on medical and dental care in Poland dates to November 1953 and applies mainly to the Warsaw area.

Medical Personnel

2. "Before WW II Poland had about 13,000 doctors, of whom about 3000 practised in Warsaw. After the war the number of doctors in the country was 7,300. At present they are still the only qualified physicians. Although the 1953 number of doctors is about 15,000, half of these are young, badly trained and without experience. Furthermore, the existing 4000 hospital personnel (nurses, orderlies, etc.) have also been poorly trained at short-term makeshift courses.
3. "The situation of the health service is simply tragic in the countryside. According to official statistics on 1 Jan 53, there were 1600 dispensaries and 'ambulances' for altogether 40,124 settlements in the country. At the ambulances there is a doctor but at the dispensaries there is only a medical orderly or a nurse. There is one motor ambulance per every 2,200 settlements.
4. "The number of doctors in Warsaw is now over 3000. This is larger than before the war, but a doctor has now much more work to do. The town is divided into 47 raions. Every raion has its own ambulance for the people insured in the sick fund and the members of their families (practically everybody is a sick fund member nowadays). There are several doctors at every ambulance; each should have at least one internist, one gynecologist and one surgeon, but this rule is not kept. In many cases the ambulance doctors have no particular specialty. However, there are a few special ambulances for children in Warsaw.

Procedure to Obtain Medical Care

5. "Everyone falling sick must go the ambulance of his raion, i.e., he has no right

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to choose his doctor. Actually this regulation is of no great importance as nobody goes to an ambulance for treatment, but rather to get a certificate enabling him to stay away from work. The minimum period of awaiting one's turn at the ambulance is three hours. There is no possibility to escape this queueing as one cannot reserve a day and hour beforehand.

6. "The ambulance doctor has his own working norms. These allow him eight minutes for every patient, and in this time he has to fill in a number of forms and papers. These absolutely have to be filled in, irrespective of whether such writing leaves any time for examining the patient.

25X1 [redacted] the doctor has to fill in from five to thirteen forms per patient, i.e., nine forms on an average, which takes at least five of the eight minutes at his disposal. In the next three minutes he takes the patient's temperature, asks what is the matter with him and gives him a prescription. If the patient has a temperature, he gets leave to stay away from work. The maximum leave an ambulance doctor can give is three days. Should the doctor give a shorter leave, two days or only one day, it often happens that the patient goes back to work even if he has a temperature. This is because a person is entitled to a sick benefit only if he has been unable to work for at least three days.

7. "A patient may not go to a doctor outside his own raion. This rule gives rise to many difficulties, especially for people who, e.g., work in Warsaw but live in an outlying suburb or a settlement near the capital. The sick fund rules say that if a person working outside his home raion should fall seriously ill and go to a doctor in the raion of his place of work in the city, this doctor can permit him to stay away from work for three days but cannot treat him or send him to a hospital. On getting his leave certificate the patient must go home, seek out his raion doctor there and stand in queue again for several hours before he can get any medicine or treatment.
8. "Should a patient suffer from a more serious disease, the raion doctor sends him either to a specialist or to the hospital, where new queues await him. No one may go to these places of his own accord, always he must pass through the raion doctor stage first. Should laboratory analysis be required, the patient is sent to the laboratory of a hospital. Hardly any laboratory tests are undertaken at the ambulances. At the hospital laboratory the patient must again wait three or four hours.
9. "It is very difficult to find room at a hospital. All are full because the rate of sickness has increased so enormously, owing to undernourishment and the sweatshop methods at places of work. The certificate of a raion doctor is far from sufficient for admittance to a hospital. There the patient is examined by a hospital doctor; it depends on that doctor whether he is admitted.
10. "The situation is further aggravated by the fact that practically all the better specialists--X-ray men, laryngologists, physiotherapists, special surgeons, etc.--are concentrated in Warsaw and at the Warsaw hospitals. Therefore thousands of patients have to travel to Warsaw, even from the farthest corners of Poland. Mothers with small children come to seek children's specialists. Repeatedly in the last few months, owing to lack of hotel rooms, mothers with small sick children had to spend the night on a bench in some park.
11. "The raion ambulances are dirty and unwholesome. There is no protection against contagion and infection. Up to a hundred people with all sorts of complaints are crowded together in a small waiting room. The ambulances are very short of personnel: there are not enough registering clerks or, worse still, nurses. In Warsaw alone the ambulances are short of 500 nurses. This was stated at the debate in the City Council on 24 Oct 53. The doctors waste 3/4 of their time on bureaucratic formalities. The treatment of the sick can be only perfunctory. Every doctor works not at one ambulance only but at two or even three medical stations; very often they are at such a distance from one another that it is impossible for him to get there in time for the beginning of his reception hours--whereby more precious time is lost.
12. "In addition to the ambulances there are about 50 so-called medical stations or home-visiting doctors in Warsaw. Such doctors may be invited to attend the patient at his home. In most cases these home-visiting doctors are the same doctors who work at the ambulances. They set aside certain days or hours of the day for these.

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duties. In addition to their salaries from the ambulances the doctors are paid 2.10 zl. by the sick fund for a visit to a patient's home. This is very little, as the tramway to the patient's home and back costs 95 groszy.

13. "The transportation problem is hardest for the doctors working in the country raions. Often to get from one patient to another, the doctor has to walk many kilometres of dirty roads or take short cuts through forests and marshes. Very often he does not manage to call on all his patients in one day.
14. "All the 47 medical raions of Warsaw have altogether only 17 old motor cars at their disposal. Half of these cars are permanently under repair. It is plain that under such circumstances no doctor can count on using a car.

Private Medical Facilities

15. "The people who are not members of a sick fund or who do not want to wait at ambulances, and those who wish to get the advice of a qualified doctor, seek him during his private reception hours. Such a visit costs no less than 60 zl. Famous specialists charge as much as 150-300 zl. Moreover, not all doctors go in for private practice as it does not always pay because of the high taxes. Every doctor is obliged to give the patient a receipt for the fee. The taxation authorities can thereby check the doctor's takings. Often, however, by tacit agreement, the patient does not take any receipt. He then either gets better attention or a reduced fee.

Dental Care

16. "The dental situation is worse. At the raion dental ambulances the dentists have so little time for each patient that they always want to pull out the tooth instead of treating it. If they fill a tooth, the filling is of most inferior quality. The cement and porcelain of local factories used at the raion ambulances is hardly fit for use. All the instruments are bad, and the cleanliness leaves much to be desired.
17. "For these reasons most people go to private dentists. Such a dentist charges 50-100 zl. to fill a tooth with foreign-made filling material. The dentists buy this material on the black market. Cement and porcelain are mostly smuggled in from the Soviet Zone of Germany and by the Soviets.

Quality of Instruments

18. "Lately there was a resounding scandal in Warsaw over dental and surgical instruments produced by the state factory at Milanowka (for particulars cf. ZYCIE WARSZAWY, 23 Nov 53). It appeared that the injection needles produced by this factory are not only weak but also have some sort of "supplementary holes" on the sides which let through air and, of course, the medicine used for injection. The rest of the output of this factory is of the same impossible quality.

Availability of Drugs

19. "No pharmacy in Warsaw stocks all the usual medicines that a well-provided pharmacy should have. It even happens that they have no Pyramidon or aspirin. Some organizations, such as the army, UB*, the Central Committee of the CP, have their own special pharmacies selling to their members only. In such pharmacies selling to their members only. In such pharmacies one can get everything, but the drugs are of Polish manufacture. Only in the army pharmacies are foreign-made medicines sometimes available.
20. "There is quite a lively trade in medicines on the black market. The main articles are foreign-made antibiotics: streptomycin, penicillin, etc. All these medicines are manufactured in Poland too but they are of a bad quality. Other much-sought medicines are various hormone preparations and some vitamins, e.g., B-12. The prices of these medicines are about 100-150% more expensive than in the West; reckoned in US dollars at a rate of 60-70 zl. per dollar.
21. "Since Oct 1953 a few so-called "pharmaceutical stations" have been opened in Warsaw, the first at 2 Ulica Bracka. Their object is to alleviate the work of the regular pharmacies. They sell medicines for which no prescription is required and also patent medicines on prescription.

*URZAD BIENPŁECZENSTWA (Security Organization)

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State Clinics

22. "There are several so-called "state clinics" for CP bosses in Warsaw. These are former private clinics. The most famous is the St. Anthony Clinic in Ulica Poznanska. The best specialists work at these clinics. They lack nothing, neither the best instruments nor medicines nor laboratories nor X-ray cabinets."

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